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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 001783

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/13/2018  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [KPKO](#) [UN](#) [LE](#) [IS](#)  
SUBJECT: ISRAELI-UNIFIL RELATIONS IMPROVING

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Luis Moreno, reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: A/DAO Chere and A/POLC met with Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Northern Command's Liaison Officer (LNO), LTC Sorrel Herskovitz, on July 31 to discuss the IDF's relations with UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). The LNO, who has served at Northern Command for nearly three years, participates in monthly meetings with UNIFIL and the LAF, which are held on the Lebanese side of the border just north of Naqura. Herskovitz commented that the situation that prevailed before the Second Lebanon War was completely different: "The IDF rarely talked with senior UNIFIL officers." While Sorrel noted the improved IDF communications with UNIFIL, he also observed that Israeli views on Lebanon in the wake of the Doha agreement would likely deteriorate: "The GOL won't be released of its responsibility for what happens next time." Herskovitz also defended IDF over flights as necessary and not as frequent as UNIFIL reports. On Ghajjar, he commented that there has been no change, and that Israel has not received any proposal from UNIFIL or the LAF to resolve the issue. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) On July 31, A/DAO and A/POLC witnessed two UNIFIL majors working out of offices adjoining the LNO's conference room at the IDF Northern Command base in Safed. The two organizations conduct daily briefings and UNIFIL's senior liaison officers meet with LTC Herskovitz on a weekly basis. Over the past six months, the UNIFIL Force Commander (FC) has met with IDF general officers (including IDF Chief of General Staff Ashkenazi, the Northern Division Commander and the IDF J-5) on more than 24 occasions. At the political level, FC Graziano has met with FM Tzipi Livni. Herskovitz noted that Graziano has expressed interest in even more senior, political meetings, but appeared relatively satisfied with the Israeli contacts he currently enjoys.

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OVER FLIGHTS  
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13. (C) LTC Herskovitz reported that at his most recent meeting with UNIFIL counterparts on July 29 the IDF shared background on Israeli over flights in order to make the point that UNIFIL may often "double-count" Israeli over flights that enter and exit the UNIFIL area of responsibility (AOR). Herskovitz indicated that the IDF had recently been going to greater lengths to respond to each UNIFIL violation report -- acknowledging some and challenging others as "inflated." He noted, for example, that if an Israeli UAV circles over Lebanese airspace for six hours, this sometimes results in UNIFIL counting as many as ten violations. If an Israeli reconnaissance aircraft conducts several reconnaissance legs in an effort to keep track of Hizballah re-arming, these legs are often counted as separate violations.

14. (C) Herskovitz noted that UNIFIL often uses Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) radar data, but would benefit from fact-checking with the IDF. More accurate reports on over flights would contribute to reducing Israeli-Lebanese

tensions, in his view. In early July the IDF invited UNIFIL officers to visit the IDF Ramat Aviv airbase to hear first-hand about Israel reconnaissance modalities. He justified such operations on the grounds that "in one week Hizballah can dig, build and cover" weapons caches in southern Lebanon. UNIFIL must wait for "evidence" (i.e. a "smoking gun"), by which time it is too late for UNIFIL to take action. He added that the IDF requires jets armed only with self-defense weapons and cameras to conduct such reconnaissance operations on an almost weekly basis, but did not require super-sonic flights. In fact, Hershvokitz stated he was an intelligence photo-interpreter specialist by background, noting that taking photos at supersonic speed severely degrades the quality of the photos. UAV "probes" provided intelligence, but there were unspecified limitations with UAVs and they could not supplant the need for longer range, faster, and more survivable overhead provided by jet aircraft. A/DAO COMMENT: It is possible there are some genuine operational and vulnerability reasons that Israeli UAVs can only penetrate so far into Lebanese airspace. END COMMENT. Moreover, Hershkowitz claimed that there had been just one sonic boom over Lebanon for which the Israeli Air Force was responsible since the Second Lebanon War. He noted that some sonic booms from Israeli aircraft operating over international waters might be audible in Lebanon. Hershkowitz also commented that the point about combat jets being unnecessary for reconnaissance missions is unfounded and stated that even MG Graziano admitted that the Italian Air Force uses its combat jets for similar missions.

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GHAJJAR

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15. (C) Hershkowitz observed that there had been no update on the Lebanese position on the divided village of Ghajjar. In follow up conversations with MFA and IDF officials, A/DAO and A/POLC confirmed that the GOI has not received any formal or informal proposal from the GOL -- or from UNIFIL. Hershkowitz noted that the IDF had inspected the security perimeter of Ghajjar with UNIFIL officials to determine if it would be effective, but the situation on the ground had not changed. UNIFIL maintained several observation posts on the Wazzani River (in Lebanon). Those posts, together with improved illumination systems and coordinated patrols had reduced smuggling through Ghajjar.

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UNIFIL LNO IN TEL AVIV  
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16. (C) Hershkowitz stated that UNIFIL has asked to put an LNO at MOD in Tel Aviv, but UNIFIL has not provided sufficient rationale to justify the reason for such a position. He further stated that he has been in the liaison job for over four years, and unlike his LAF or even UNIFIL counterparts of much higher rank, he is fully empowered to make all decisions and is in tune with the IDF senior command. In his view, the problem is more a matter of protocol and rank consciousness with the LAF and UNIFIL than the actual business that needs to be done on the ground.

17. (C) Comment. A/DAO confirmed that protocol is a longstanding issue with UNIFIL, UNDOF, and MFO Commanders (all major generals). They have all grumbled on several occasions that the protocol issue with the IDF is atrocious since that they see captains and colonels in Israel while in Damascus and Beirut they see the Ministers of Defense and the Chiefs of Staff of the Syrian and Lebanese militaries on a regular basis. There is some truth to this, although the reality is the depth of IDF leadership is thin and multi-tasked comparatively speaking, and it is not uncommon to see officers of much junior rank in positions of higher responsibility and fully empowered to make the commensurate

decisions.

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